DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 509 SP 016 936

AUTHOR Curran, Paul F.
TITLE Education in the 80's: A Leadership Opportunity for the Congress.
PUB DATE Jan 80
NOTE 15p.: Prepared for House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education (96th Congress, 2nd Session) "Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 1980's: A Compendium of Policy Papers." For related documents, see ED 185 660 and ED 194 475.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Legislation: *Educational Needs: Educational Policy: Elementary Secondary Education: Family School Relationship: Federal Aid: Federal Government: Federal Regulation: *Government Role: Government School Relationship: Individualized Instruction: *Needs Assessment: Private Schools: *Public Policy: Tax Credits
IDENTIFIERS *Congress

ABSTRACT

The Congress should be the principal architect of educational policy in the 1980s through: preserving traditional middle-class values in any potential legislation, reducing regulations and paperwork, insuring a positive impact for political forces that shape education, rewarding success and fostering accountability, and encouraging diversity in education. Positive educational trends include individualized education and legislation to provide parents with a wider choice of schools. (SAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED195509

Sol
'80
13

EDUCATION IN THE 80'S: A LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CONGRESS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

BY: Rev. Msgr. Paul F. Curran
Vicar for Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Philadelphia

SP 016 936

The dominant mood of the 70's in American education has been a sense of helplessness about the future. It seems at times that the more we spend, the less we accomplish; rising per-pupil expenditures are matched by plummeting test scores. And yet the recent visit of Pope John Paul II to our shores seems to demonstrate that individuals - and institutions - who know what they are about and where they are headed produce a contagious hopefulness in others. Certainly sense of purpose and hopefulness will not of themselves produce an educated citizenry, but they are vital qualities in individuals and institutions that are charged with that responsibility for the 80's and beyond.

One such institution is the Congress. Despite protestations about local control, the federal government and its branches will have much to say about the future shape of schools. The recent creation of a cabinet-level Department of Education shows the machinery of government readying itself for this expanded role.

The fact is that the well is running dry of new resources for education from local and state taxes. Inevitably, the federal government will be asked to do for education the one task it does supremely well - to collect money. And as the federal government pays more and more of the education bill, it will more and more shape the future of education, for "he who pays the piper calls the tune."

This is a new role for federal government that many of us anticipate with profound apprehension.

If federal involvement in education is to be a sign of hope and a harbinger of change for the better, the Congress had better

determine now what it wants to nourish and what it wants to avoid in fulfilling is expanding role in American education.

At best, the Congress should shape legislation toward a specific vision of what the citizen of the 80's will need and be and how he or she should be educated.

As this vision slowly takes shape, a partial list of policies to be encouraged by theCongress in the meantime would be the following:

1) The Laws of the 80's Must Support, Not Damage the American Family

This may seem an unlikely place to start in speaking of schools. Why is support for the family structure important in this context? It is evident that otherwise ordinary schools produce extraordinary student achievement when students come from homes in which education is valued and nourished. One middle-class suburban Catholic school outside Philadelphia - with forty children in each classroom - has an average student performance level which is one year to a year and a half above national norms through the eight grades. The program is comparable to that of other schools with less dramatic results to show; teacher experience, training, and apparent competence are likewise comparable; class size is typically smaller in those other schools. The difference appears to be families which nurture learning.

Yet this positive home support is threatened. Among many negative forces, there is one which the Congress can control.

The frightful taxation/inflation squeeze on the middle-class family that patronizes schools like the one in question is bound to diminish and may even destroy those positive educational influences of a healthy home. Our nation has a history of reaching out to help families already in trouble; in carrying out its legislative responsibilities and functions, the Congress has an opportunity to help solid families stay strong. At the same time, this concern for the family should not lead to governmental efforts at any level to reshape traditional family values and structures.

Specifically, what assistance can the Congress give to healthy homes that develop the readiness of children for learning? Congress must gear tax relief to parents during the years in which child-rearing expenses strain family resources and relationships. Present public policy frequently seems anti-family. For example, an institutionalized child receives far more help than a child maintained within the family; until recently, the family had to be impoverished before any relief for the cost of education was forthcoming. The recent Middle Income Student Assistance Act was a small but useful step to broaden relief for college educational costs of self-supporting families. Similarly motivated but different relief should be extended to families with younger children who need to carry at this time a lighter tax load. Tax policies which relieve financial pressures on the home are pro-family policies.

As government seeks to help the poor and to be sensitive to the already wounded family structure, it must also be aware that the fabric of family life in mainstream America is strained. If public policy does not help healthy families to stay healthy, the effort to repair damage once done and neglected will be beyond our national ingenuity and resources.

2. The Congress Should Take the Lead in Insuring A Positive Impact for the Many Political Forces Shaping American Education

Whether we mourn its passing or not, the Walton's Mountain epoch of American education is gone or is rapidly disappearing. Even isolated rural communities have felt the impact of the values of the larger community through television. Yet one fundamental purpose that all schools share remains simple and straight-forward: To serve children, and to prepare them for adult life.

The forces that make that purpose attainable are not just in the classroom. Traditionally, the teacher has needed the support of the school community --- principals, parents, other teachers, superintendents --- and of the larger community of taxpayers and interested citizens.

Two new forces are influencing or are about to influence this child-centered purpose most powerfully: The creation of the Department of Education, a symbol of the increased federal role in education, and the rise of teacher unions and organizations, a huge army of voters powerfully influencing a still larger army of voters --- the parents.

Both of these forces will spearhead the drive in the '80's to increase the federal portion of support for public education from less than 10% to 30% or more. The important question is this: HOW CAN THE CONGRESS ENSURE THAT ANY INCREASE IN SUPPORT --- AND TAXATION --- FOR SCHOOLS WILL ULTIMATELY BE GOOD FOR THE CHILD-NURTURING PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, AND AT THE SAME TIME, PRESERVE THE ECONOMIC STABILITY OF OUR NATION AS A WHOLE?

The ability of Congress to take theleadership in this issue and not to be overpowered by it will be crucial. Clearly, the Congress may not interfere with the free and proper development of organized teacher power; it may and must question the legislative agenda and activities of such organizations to see that in each instance the general good is served. And the Congress does have the obligation to exercise legislative oversight of the instruments of government, such as the new Department of Education, which carry out public policy and may tend too aggressively to create it as well.

A great deal of honesty about the present and future uses of power in American education will be needed as the federal financial role in education gives future Congresses and administrations great influence over the forms of American education in the '80's, and over who will control the schools in that future.

3. The Congress Should Reward Success and Foster Accountability

Childhood diabetes is a frightening malady, but it can be controlled with medication. What would we think of a parent who would say to us, "Johnny has been taking his medication for a year now, and his diabetes is under control. So now we're stopping the medication"? No, we would say, it is not enough to stabilize the condition; you must maintain that balance through continued medication, so long as the risk of a setback is there.

This example illustrates the difficulty of our current federal policy toward the educationally disadvantaged child living in an economically depressed area; that policy punishes success and rewards failure. It is the problem particularly of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. IF IN FACT A SCHOOL SUCCEEDS IN BRINGING UNDERACHIEVING CHILDREN UP TO WHERE THEY SHOULD BE IN ACHIEVEMENT, SERVICE TO THESE CHILDREN STOPS FORTHWITH. It is as if we pretend that the social forces that contributed so largely to their earlier failure will not continue to undermine the educational health of such children.

One possible partial solution is for the Congress to mandate that, to maintain their achievement levels, eligible children may continue to receive appropriate service under Title I for a prolonged period after they begin to perform at levels appropriate to their age and grade.

The fact is that the "hellish cycle of poverty" never ceases to pull back toward failure the child who has begun to learn. The negative forces are still at work even when the child starts to succeed in his school work. We must reward that child's success by continued service and support in order to insure that that success is enduring.

This lead-off example illustrates a trap to be avoided as Congress seeks to clarify its widening educational responsibilities and role for the '80's.

But what about schools - and children - who still fail?

We are a nation with a generous heart. When that generosity leads us to give children a true chance to learn, it is a productive impulse; when it leads us to mobilize what resources are needed to heal handicaps which can be corrected, it ennobles our national character. But when as responsible adults we ignore the educational needs or even cripple the educational growth of the majority of children in a school in order to preserve the improperly defined rights to traditional educational programs of those who will not, or perhaps cannot profit from such programs, that is bad public policy and bad schooling for both categories of children.

This observation is not an invitation for teachers to pursue self-fulfilling prophecies of failure or for disruptive children to be neglected. It is an argument for realism, for tailoring the program to the child, and for nurturing in each child respect for the rights of every other child.

The Congress cannot control and is not responsible for excessive permissiveness in schools. But rewarding success may influence changes necessary to insure that success is possible. And only then can teachers - and administrators - be held accountable.

The flaw in keying support solely to bad test results or disruptive school situations is that attitudes will never change which prevent success or allow disorder. A way must be found to stop pouring good money into unsuccessful programs and policies.

There is a vast group of children who need help and want help; there are teachers who want to help them. But no one learns in an armed camp or with the wrong program to meet his or her needs. When we are determined to make or keep our schools as places of learning and human development, then we can hold these institutions, and those who staff them, accountable.

4. The Congress Should Continue Its Efforts To Limit Paperwork As the Price of Benefits; It Should Insist That Those Who Write Regulations Do Not Exceed Or Impede the Intention of Congress

In recent years the Congress has demonstrated its commitment to reduce needless regulation and paperwork. Yet as Congress reduces with one hand, the regulatory agencies multiply with the other the number and complexity of conditions to be met in order to receive benefits, to avoid penalties, and to satisfy examiners and auditors. Those who accuse the courts of assuming the legislative function have not seen anything until they have studied the activities of regulatory agencies. As Congress examines the rule-writing of federal agencies year by year and determines whether such regulation is justified by

the law, it must set limits to this dangerous and growing regulatory impulse. And it is in agency budget approval that Congress can draw the line.

Perhaps congressional investigation is the only route to discovering why regulatory agencies are growing so militant and are more frequently exceeding their legislative mandates. This intimidation is a threat to the quality of American education, public and private, in the '80's. One is reminded of the observation of John Stuart Mill:

> A state which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hand, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great things can be accomplished.

5. The Congress Should Encourage Diversity in Education

This paper and other like it may suggest an objectivity and lack of special pleading that is really beyond the ability of any mere mortal. And so, this set of proposed policy directions will close with a bit of advocacy for non-public school children, especially those who attend religious schools. These schools are a precious resource of our nation, and their future is in peril. What is more important, we as a nation still need schools which enable parents to exercise free choice in the education of their children and to satisfy the dictates of their consciences in the education of these children.

Preservation of the rights of conscience should require no justification. Hence, the first question to be answered is,

"WHY SHOULD THE CONGRESS FOSTER THIS PARENT-CHILD FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN SCHOOLING?" And the second is "HOW AND WHAT SHOULD IT DO?"

The following are some answers to the first question; these are reasons for keeping alternatives to public education truly available:

A. A right which cannot be exercised is no right at all.

At the present time, the rich can choose exclusive, independent schools and the upper middle-class can choose exclusive neighborhoods for the public schooling of their children. The poor have little choice at all; increasingly this is true for the lower-middle and middle classes, too. And when conscience factors impel the parent toward a religious school and inflation/taxation burdens inhibit this selection, freedom of choice and freedom of conscience are both threatened.

B. Non-public schools foster healthy competition and innovation.

The Congress has a long history of opposition to monopolies. In fact, such opposition seems especially American. But increasingly, high taxes and the absence of relief for non-public school parents constitute a pro-monopoly policy in favor of public schools.

Why is this kind of monopoly unhealthy? One obvious answer leaps to mind: What challenge does a monopoly have to

improve if it is the only game in town? Will public schools be better if they are the only schools, except for a few wealthy academies? Our history suggests the contrary: Diversity nourishes growth.

C. In urban areas, non-public schools contribute to neighborhood stability, to a stronger tax base, and to integrated communities.

The recent study of Thomas Vitullo-Martin[1] effectively explodes a series of myths about private education in urban settings:

I. Segregated suburban public schools, not urban private schools, are a major determinant of racial segregation in the cities.

II. The presence of private schools in cities evidently has a stabilizing influence against the flight from the cities.

III. Those who stay and choose non-public schools do not increase the demands on public education in the cities but do contribute to its support; in turn they face a double burden of tuition and taxation.

IV. Those who move to the suburbs and choose the public schools there get a disproportionate return for their tax dollars, since their tax support of public schools is tax-deductible.

These are some reasons why the Congress should encourage

---

1. Thomas Vitullo-Martin, "Private Schools and Urban Integration," in New Perspectives on School Integration, edited by Murray Friedman, et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) pp. 64-70.

variety and diversity in American schools. There are two policy directions the Congress can follow to help that diversity continue to be available:

A. Congress should continue to seek a fair share of benefits from federal legislation for eligible children in non-public schools who have handicaps and educational limitations. For example, the effort to insure state compliance with the intent of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act should be continued; the scandalous failures to apply the Education of the Handicapped Act to non-public school children should be corrected.

B. As we saw earlier, tax relief is the means most immediately available to Congress to assist parents in some measure with the financial strains which are most acute during the school-age years of their children. The Congress should therefore consider again some form of tax relief for parents, such as the tuition tax-credit idea.

In passing, we might observe that freedom of choice through a voucher plan is more likely to occur in the immediate future at the state level. At the federal level, voucher legislation will only pass if general dissatisfaction with a public education monopoly overpowers those strong forces which want all aid to go to public schools and public school children.

CONCLUSION

This paper, and the others in this collection, are bound to be unsatisfying for the legislator, the general reader, and the author alike. The limitations are not just those of space, for we are

talking about preparing young people for a world we can ourselves only dimly perceive.

And so we must finally look not to issues or programs for answers, but to our own vision of what the man and woman of the decades ahead should be, though we know not what they will do.

Tom Fox, the columnist, quotes his mother's description of what parents must do for children: "Give them roots, and wings." Roots to know where they come from - their heritage and its values - and wings - to dare to grow, to be truly unique, as every human being can and is meant to be. Roots and wings - a good guide for schools and for Congress itself.

Let me close with some of the qualities which I would suggest the man and woman of the 21st Century will need, whatever is the shape of their world, and life, and work. They will need to be trained with intellectual rigor, according to their abilities and future needs and those of society, and with nourished powers of independent judgment and respect for work and personal responsibility. Even more will they need respect for human dignity, their own and that of others, which will foster a sense of reverence and responsibility for others as well. And finally, because we are, as Justice Douglas once said, a religious people, the man and woman of the future must reverence God, and accept the world as a precious gift He places in our stewardship. May He bless and guide the Congress, for it will powerfully influence the future of our greatest natural resource , our children.